THE AERONAUT.

No. 159. May 28. 1818.

Non est humano consilio.

FOSTER, the eloquent author of "Essays in a series of letters to a friend;"—has made it a subject of complaint, that men of literary taste and distinction are so often averse to the themes of evangelical religion, & in particular, that the writers of periodical essays have so seldom made them the objects of their remarks & their contemplations. He justly observes, that few works have tended more to the improvement of the taste and general morals of society, than these sets of essays; and therefore the more deeply regrets, that their religion was little more than what he terms, a

literary religion, passing by or totally omitting the closer and more decisive truths of Christianity, and accomodating even the tone of their morals to the taste of every one. The greatest of the English Essayists, Addison and Johnson, stern and rigid as their morality is, are yet liable to censure on this account; as they almost entirely omit the mention of the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, & rather write like enlightened heathens, than practical Christians. The blessed Redeemer of the world is forgotten; the scheme of gospel salvation passed by in silence. Man is indeed told that this is a world of sin, of sorrow, & of corruption; but is he instructed how to seek a better? He is warned of the total insufficiency of all earthly things; but is he led by the persuasive tones of gospel eloquence, to come to the foot of the cross, and through the sufferings and merits of a crucified Redeemer to look for that crown of glory which fadeth not away? - These are themes, on which the powers of mind, the bursts of eloquence, which those great men possessed, might be

called into full play. These are themes, where the soul may be lost in wonder at the stupendous glories of the providence, the mercy, the forgiveness of God. The heathen may expatiate on moral subjects in a general way; — nay, the writers of antiquity put to the blush many of our modern moralists: — but to the Christian philosopher is it reserved, to make that transcendent display to the eyes of mankind, which the revelation of Christ alone can afford; before which the slender maxims of mere human morality sink into nothing, and which when rightly viewed, overwhelms all around in its own blaze of light, and lustre, and love.

We are well aware, that these are subjects, which to the map of readers are offensive and disagreable. But is one who undertake, the very responsible task of instructing his fellow-men, to shrink from his duty, because he may run the risk of incurring their displeasure? Are the sacred truths of heaven to be past by, because they may be condemned by those whom the 'god of this world has blinded?' — It may be replied, the appointed

ministers of religion are sufficient to teach these truths, to inculcate these precepts, to expatiate on these themes. — And is religion then, to be confined to the pulpit — the instructions of the gospel to the first day of the week? Are we not enjoined by him who spake as never man spake, to admonish & to instruct one another? And above all, is he, who professes to write for the express purpose of conveying those lessons of experience and instruction which he deems most serviceable to his fellow creatures, is he, we ask, to omit the greatest, the most important, the best gift of God to man, the dispensation of grace & mercy through our Lord Jesus Christ? He who shrinks from this, is unworthy of his task. If we are all to be but mere moralists, if the cold and formal instructions of frozen hearts, and earthly affections, are to conduct us to heaven; why, Oh! why has a Saviour suffered, a God descended to ransom & redeem our race? What are we better than the

poor heathen who wanders in the perplexing wild of natural light, if we have no higher hope — no nobler boon than this? If the suggestions of the world were true; if the cool and undiscriminating morality of too many who profess the title of moralists were instrumental for our salvation; we must be forced, (we tremble as we write,) to come to the dreadful conclusion, that Christ has died in vain; that the Bible is a needless production; & that the "army of martyrs," who have fought and suffered & died for the name of their Redeemer, were deluded by a false imagining, a superstitious hope! — May God in his mercy spare us from this! —

It is therefore an important part of the duty of the writers of periodical essays, to keep evangelical religion ever in view. We do not wish to be understood as prescribing to them this as their only theme. We only would recommend to them to make it their paramount object; or at

least to make every other subject on which they touch in some measure subservient to its interests, and to suffer nothing to appear in any degree tending to lessen the influence, authority, and importance of the gospel in the minds of men. How many times do opportunities occur in the course of their labors, for bringing home 'to the business & bosoms of men', (to use the expression of Lord Bacon,) the truths of Christianity! — to guide the wandering sheep to the safe and sheltering fold; to alarm the conscience of the slumbering sinner; to expose the utter hollowness of all earthly good, of all sublunary hope; to spread life & bloom upon the desert void of the heart; & to lift up the eye grovelling in the baseness of sensuality, to heaven, & light, & happiness! As they float adown the fluctuating current of life, how often may they be able to point out the hidden quicksand, and the impending storm; to tell the tale of their own & others' experience and lead the "poor wanderer of a

stormy day" to behold the "bright and morning Star" inviting his wearied soul to safety & repose! — O why should we seek to beguile our consciences to slumber by the beggarly sophistry of mere human reason? When there is a light revealed to us, why should we prefer our own inventions — the devices & imaginations of our own hearts, to the fulness and glory of the gospel dispensation? — Why should the moralist hesitate for a moment to point out to his readers the only course to heaven? Why should they be lulled to a false security by a morality, plausible in its appearance, beautiful in its texture, correct in most of its sentiments, — but wanting that "unction from above", that holy warmth of appeal to the heart, that decisiveness of tone, & feeling, & expression, which prove the sincerity of the writer, and evince his piety, his devotion to God, his anxious desire for the welfare of immortal souls? Had the powers of those who have been

distinguished in this department of literature, been thus employed, how might they have blest, and beautified, and adorned the face of society! How far more extensive, and how gloriously different might have been the effect of their writings upon the hearts & manners of the age! And it must ever be a source of deep regret, that they were thus neglectful of so important a part of their duty, when these reflections force themselves upon the mind.

We know well that one objection to their exerting their talents in the cause of practical religion, lay in the unpopularity of so doing. But here, we must be compelled to say, ought to be an additional inducement. If what they pass over in silence be of such infinite importance as we have asserted; if mankind are so blind, & so ignorant, & so depraved as to shut their ears to the voice of religion; — how much more forcibly does it appear a duty to endeavor to open their eyes to the dangers

of their situation, and the terrors & glories of a future world; to the wretchedness of their nature, and to the only means of recovery through a crucified Saviour! — If we are to be deterred from duty because it is unpopular; if we are to stifle the voice of conscience because its warning tones would fall unpleasantly upon the ear of our fellow mortals — weak — frail — fallible — & fleeting as ourselves: then farewell to all hopes of amendment or instruction.

We have already dwelt long on the subject of this paper. It is time to apply it to ourselves. Many of our good readers have probably been ready to exclaim against us with Polybius, "Το μεν επιτιμησαι τοις πελας, εστι ραδιον· το δ'αυτον αναμαρτητον παρεχεσθαι χαλεπον: — to observe the faults of others, is easy enough; but to be without error ourselves, is a more difficult matter. — We fear we have but too much reason to plead guilty to the charge. In reviewing our past

lucubrations, we confess that too little has been said upon the great, the paramount subjects of religion. But to make a formal defence of our neglect, would be to assume what it does not become us to do; to put ourselves upon a par with our illustrious predecessors. Yet, on the other hand, we are ready to acknowledge, that the duty is not the less, because the writer is more humble; and that we are all enjoined, whatever be our station or our capacity, to fulfil it to the extent of our ability. The most degraded of mankind, so long as he has intelligence, has at least some talents given him to improve for the benefit of his fellows. The most hopeless, and the most abject, is not without his stewardship; and of that an account must be given in at the last great & day of reckoning with Him whom we have so often offended, and from whom we have so long, and so repeatedly wandered.

But if we could all look forward to that eventful and terrible period with right views and feelings, how different would be our conduct while on earth, and how should we strive for each other's welfare, that we might then be clear from "the blood of souls!"—

E.